DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 169 751 FL 010 103

AUTHOR Garganta, Soledad; Ramirez, Inez
TITLE Bilingual Reading.
PUB DATE 21 Oct 78
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the joint conference of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching, the Texas Foreign Language Association, and the Texas Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (San Antonio, Texas, October, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Education; Bilingualism; Bilingual Students; Elementary Secondary Education; English; *English (Second Language); *Language Dominance; Language Instruction; *Language Proficiency; Language Skills; Language Tests; Reading Instruction; Reading Level; *Reading Programs; Reading Skills; *Reading Tests; Second Language Learning; Spanish
IDENTIFIERS Fabens Independent School District TX; *Limited English Speaking Ability

ABSTRACT

This report discusses the importance of bilingual reading instruction for limited English speaking ability (LESA) students, and careful testing of their language dominance and reading levels. Bilingual students, and English- and Spanish-dominant students from the Fabens Independent School District, Grades K-13, were tested for the data reported here. The Fabens Language Proficiency Test and Informal Reading Inventories (IRI's) were administered, and results showed that the percentage of students reading below grade level averaged 72.60% in Grades 1-12 (non-readers are the norm for K). The following objectives were established: (1) to develop students' language skills in both English and Spanish; (2) to design and develop materials and programs to meet the needs of LESA students; (3) to enhance appreciation of cultural heritage; (4) to increase community, parental, and school interaction; and (5) to develop teacher competencies in two languages through both pre-service and in-service individualized programs. In particular, the testing of language dominance is discussed, including an explanation of the Canutillo/Fabens Oral Language Dominance and Proficiency Inventory, described as sequential, progressive and inherently self-checking. A flow chart for this process and a description of the reading level assessments used are also included. (MHP)

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BILINGUAL READING

BY

Dr. Soledad Garganta & Dr. Inez Ramirez

A Presentation at the

Joint Conference of SCOLT-TFLA-TEXTESOL

San Antonio, Texas

October 21, 1978

FL010103

BILINGUAL READING

Rationale

The Fabens Independent School District, located in West Texas has a student population between the ages of three and eighteen of 1,865. Of these, 1,308 (70.13 percent) are of limited English speaking ability. Due to this and the fact that all classes had been conducted solely in English and at "grade level", an average of 83.60 percent of the student population read below grade level. For every 2.5 students who continued their education after high school, one dropped out prior to high school graduation.

Language Proficiency

The results of the Fabens Language Proficiency Test demonstrated that a critical need existed in the district for bilingual-multicultural education with particular emphasis on teaching the communication skills. However, an analysis of the data in Table 1 shows that 70.03 percent of the total student population and 94.91 percent of the target population (K-3) were of limited English speaking ability.

Reading Proficiency

In September of 1975, all students enrolled in the Fabens Primary School were administered Informal Reading Inventories (IRI's). The results were tabulated (see Table 2) and showed that of a total of 442 students tested, 265 (59.95 percent) read one or more years below grade level. Although these statistics are by themselves grim enough to demonstrate great need, one should note that the percentages were

TABLE 1

Children of Limited English Speaking Ability in the Fabens Independent School District

Age	Totals	Number of LESA	Percentage of LESA
3	119	119	100%
4	137	137	100%
5	86	80	93.02%
6	134	130	95.59%
7	134	119	88.81%
8	112	97	86.61%
9	104	96	92.31%
10	118	101	85.59%
11	132	88	66.67%
12	130	70	53.85%
13	142	73	54.89%
14	88	75	85.23%
15	143	65	45.45%
16	117	45	38.46%
17	110	26	23.64%
18	57	20	35.09%
Total	1865	1308	70.03%

TABLE 2

INFORMAL READING INVENTORY REPORT

Fabens Primary School

Grade	Number of Students Tested	Number At/Above Grade Level	Percent At/Above Grade Level	Number Below Grade Level	Percent Below Grade Level
K	77	77	100%		
1	135	71	52.59%	64	47.41%
2	122	9	7.38%	113	92.62%
3	103	20	18.52%	88	81.48%
TOTALS	442	177	20.05%	265	59.95%
Totals without Kindergarten	365	100	27.40%	265	72.60%

developed using the total enrollment of the primary school, including kindergarten, and obviously, at the beginning of a child's first year of school, he cannot help but be at grade level or above, as a non-reader is the norm for kindergarten students. When the kindergarten enrollment is subtracted from the total population (Table 2), the statistics become more realistic. The percent of students reading below grade level increases to 72.60 percent.

In order to adequately meet the needs of the student population, the Board of Trustees adopted a policy committing the district to a program of bilingual-multicultural education for all students.

Objectives

Objectives identified by the district faculty and staff, students and parents were:

1. To develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in both English and Spanish according to the needs of each student.
2. To design and develop programs that will meet the needs of students of LESA.
3. To design and develop materials for the programs developed in number two above, that will allow the serving of the student's individual needs.
4. To impart to the students a knowledge, appreciation and pride in their cultural heritage.
5. To increase communication and interaction between the home and school.
6. To increase parents and community participation in the educational process.
7. To develop teacher competencies in two languages in an individualized setting through a preservice and in-service training program.

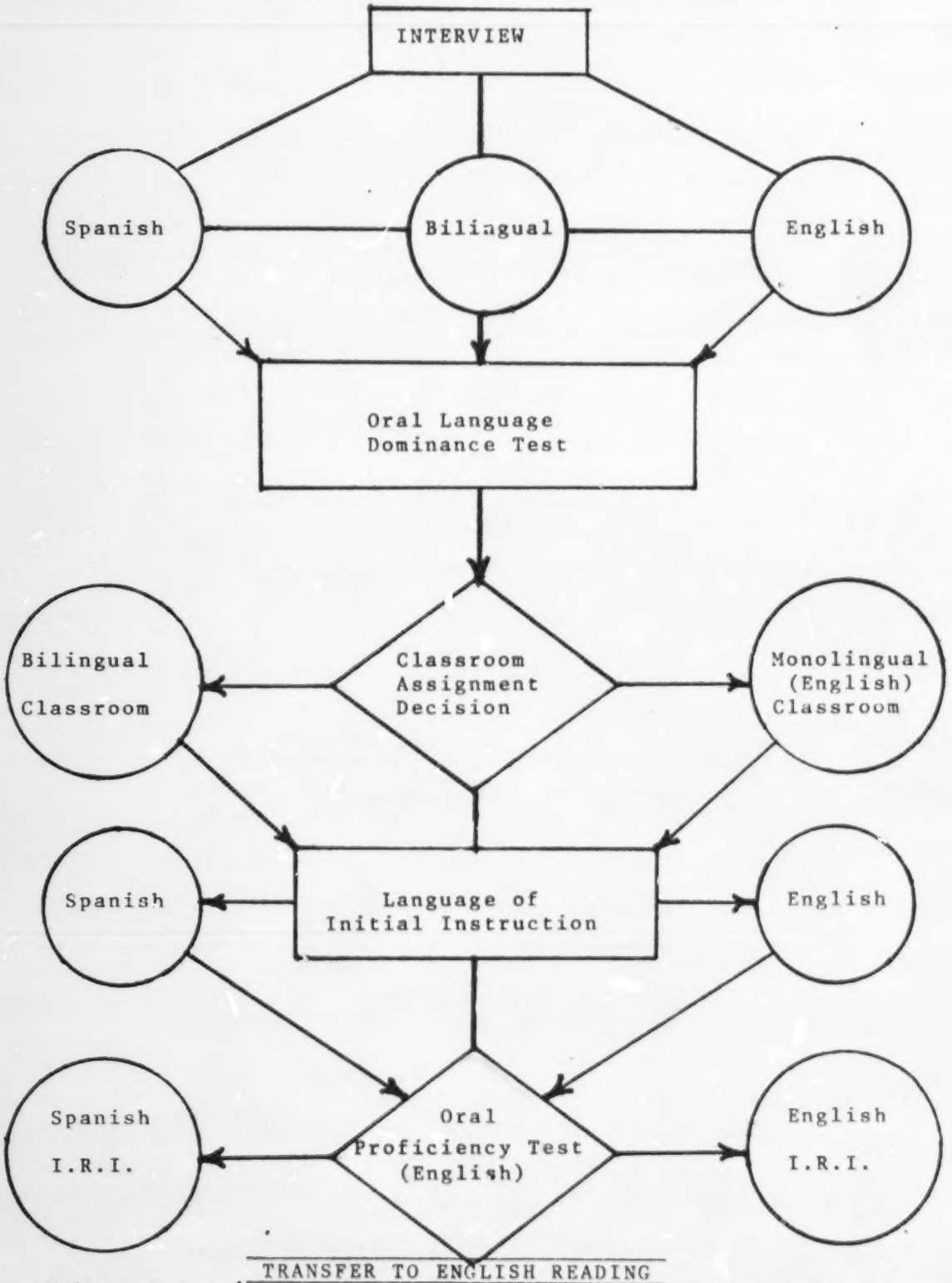
Determination of Language Dominance

In order to fulfill the above mentioned objectives, especially

number one and two, the identification of a child's dominant language was essential. The identification of dominant language and student language proficiency may be viewed as a process of alternative elimination adn as such a process, the Canutillo/Fabens Oral Language Dominance and Proficiency Inventory is sequential, progressive, and inherently self-checking. In order to more fully explain the process, it is sequentially delineated in the following paragraphs and illustrated in Chart 1.

1. A simple interview is used as an initial screening device. This interview identifies home language, first language learned, leanguage of preference, and social language. This interview leads directly to the first decision module in the process. Students are tentatively classified as Spanish dominant, Bilingual, or English dominant. Spanish dominant and bilingual students proceed to the next data generation module while English dominant students are assigned to English language classrooms. It is worthy of note that when in doubt as to classification, one should tentatively assign students to the bilingual or Spanish dominant classification. This retains the student in the assessment process and thereby allows the generation of more accurate data for decision-making.
2. Spanish dominant and bilingual students are next administered the Canutillo/Fabens Oral Language Dominance Test. This instrument is also an interview. It consists of a series of four questions in English and four questions in

CHART 1



TRANSFER TO ENGLISH READING

Fabens I.S.D.'s Criteria

Spanish Reading Level is 22
English Oral Level is 2 yrs. above reading level

Canutillo I.S.D.'s Criteria

Spanish Reading Level is 31
English Oral Level is 1 yr. above reading level

series of four questions in English and four questions in Spanish. As the student responds to the series of questions, he is assessed in the areas of fluency, sentence structure, descriptive word usage, pronounciation, and expressive ability. This instrument provided data for the classroom assignment decision module.

It should be noted at this juncture that an interview format was selected because surveys sent home often do not return and assessment involves the recording of responses on the part of the student. Parents may attempt to "coach" their children into English language classrooms by directing their child to fail to respond in Spanish and any instrument that involves reading cannot but measure both language and reading. The one-on-one interview eliminates these problems. While the interview format eliminates many problems, one major obstacle must be overcome if the format is to succeed. Interviewers must be carefully trained and then closely supervised in order that intra-tester reliability can be developed and maintained.

3. Once classroom assignment and therefore language of initial instruction decisions have been made, additional information is needed. Specifically, language proficiency data must be obtained. It is not enough to identify dominant language. If the student is dominant in Spanish but verbally nearly non-functional, his in-class treatment must vary from the student who is Spanish dominant and highly proficient in his dominant language. In order that this data be developed, the Canutillo/Fabens Oral Language Proficiency Test

will be administered. Two versions of the test should be available for use and both may be sued at the discretion of the teacher based upon his opinion and the data provided by the foregoing instruments.

The Canutillo/Fabens Oral Language Proficiency Test consists of a series of graded reading passages from 50-200 words in length, depending upon the level of the material and the amount needed to provide the student a basis for response, and a series of four to eight questions dealing with the material presented in the passage. At all levels, passages should be available in both English and Spanish. The test is designed to assess the level of oral language comprehension the student possesses. This is accomplished by reading the passage to the student and asking the student the attendent questions upon completion of the reading. In order to properly assess the student's performance, it is necessary that the administrator be bilingual. Language proficiency is demonstrated by the student answering the questions in whatever language he chooses. If the passage read was in English and the student responds at the 60% level in English, he not only understands that level of oral English, but possesses that level of facility in oral English production. If his responses are also valid at the same level but in Spanish, then it may be inferred that the student can understand English at the level of the passage but lack the oral language production skills. Evaluation is the same regardless of the language of the passage. The information thus garnered provides the basis for the development of each student's learning program.

Determination of Reading Levels

In determining a student's reading level, three factors must be taken into account. These are comprehension, word recognition, and fluency. Comprehension is subdivided into independent, instructional, and frustrational levels. The independent level is when a reader understands 80% or more of the material read; the instructional level is when a reader understands 60% to 79% of the material read; and the frustrational level is when a reader understands 59% or less of the material read. The reader's instructional level must be carefully determined since this will be a deciding factor as to the basal in which he will be placed. Word recognition is knowing how to read words. The independent level of word recognition has the reader knowing 97% or more of the words; the instructional level between 92% and 96% of the words; and the frustrational level 91% or less of the words. Fluency is the speed with which a given passage is read. This is given in words per minute and differs depending on the level of basal used. For example, a child's rate at the pre-primer level should be 45 wpm; at the primer level, 50 wpm; and at first grade level, 60 wpm.

Kindergarten students determined to be Spanish dominant, are given all their reading readiness skills in Spanish, and when ready to commence reading, read Spanish basals. Once they meet the criteria for transfer into English reading, they are started at the pre-primer level of basals in English, while continuing to read Spanish basals at their Spanish reading instructional level.

The procedure for assessing a student's reading level follows:

1. The student is asked to read orally a 50-250 word passage from a basal.
2. While the student is reading, the teacher or aide notes the number of word recognition errors the student makes.
3. At the conclusion of the oral reading, the student is asked between three and seven comprehension questions.
4. In determining fluency, the student is asked to to read silently for fifteen seconds. The words read are counted and multiplied by four to give a words per minute count.

Depending on the level at which the student performs, based on the aforementioned criteria, the student will either be placed in that level of basal or be administered another informal reading inventory at a higher or lower level. spanish dominant students are administered it in Spanish, while the English dominant students are assessed in English.

The big question asked by most everyone, 'When do you transfer from Spanish to English reading?", has two answers, as can be seen in Chart 1. If these are scrutinized, however, there is very little difference between them. The criteria, used by the Fabens Independent School District, that a pupil's Spanish Reading Level be at the second reader of second grade and that his English Oral Level be two years above his reading level or at fourth grade level is comparable to the criteris, used by the Canutillo Independent School District, that a pupil's Spanish Reading Level be at the first reader of third grade and that his English Oral Level be one year above his reading level or at fourth grade level.

Regardless of what language the student is reading, he is in an individualized program. The teacher listens to the student read, diagnoses his weaknesses, prescribes to those weaknesses, direct teaches to those weaknesses, and assigns supplemental work pertaining to those same weaknesses. The above approach necessitates that each student have his own reading contract, which may, at any point in time, be entirely different from any other student's contract, even though the class may have an enrollment of twenty-five or over.